

i am here (the missing chapters)

the original manuscript of my book quite different to the book which was published. for a start it was more than ten thousand words longer. john, my editor and sort-of agent, god rest his soul, suggested that i remove, among other things, the autobiographical middle section, which was called first interlude. i came across it and read it for the first time in many years and thought it not without merit so i reproduce it here in case anyone is interested.

FIRST INTERLUDE

my father was not a poet

There are worse things than dying. One is disappearing. One day you're just not there anymore and no one knows why or where you've gone. In one sense disappearing is exactly the same as dying: someone is no longer there but there's no cold hard body – or no warm-soft-body-gradually-becoming-cold-and-hard as you're standing there with clammy hands clasped behind your back, and a heavy chest.

When someone disappears something else remains: the possibility that they might reappear. There is no solid Nothing, and there is no closure.

When someone dies, you don't know where they are either, but you know what happened. Everyone knows. There's a good solid narrative that everyone can understand. If someone asks, you can say : They died, and people look concerned and are nice to you.

My father did both: First he disappeared. I was five. I couldn't understand why he was gone, or where he went and I just expected him to come back. I don't really remember anything but a vague sense that one day he would just be there again, like he always was before.

I don't remember him saying goodbye or explaining why he was leaving. If he'd been a poet maybe he would have written a poem about it and I could read it now, but he was a policeman. My mother must have tried to explain it to me but I don't remember the explanation. Or maybe she was too devastated herself to

understand it, let alone explain it to a five year old.

There is a gap in my memory too, an absence. I have plenty of memories from before, but then ... nothing, for a long time, a year or more. I don't remember moving house. I don't remember my first day at school. I do remember crying a lot in my first years of school. I would cry at the drop of a hat.

And he wasn't there for a long time and then he periodically reappeared, usually to argue with my mother about money and make her cry – or she made him cry and stamp his foot – and then he disappeared again, and I got used to the comings and goings.

And then he died. But that was later. And in a way that made it better. Being dead is something everyone can understand.

When I'd finished a halfway decent draft of the first part of this book, I asked a friend, who has advanced leukemia and maybe a year or so to live if she's lucky, to read it. She liked

it. She said: It's a good read! but she didn't like the title.

"Oh?"

"You want to be a hero! You can't say that you'll be there. Because you might not be able to be there."

"But it's called 'I am here' and I'm here now! And when I'm here, I am here!"

But perhaps my friend was voicing her fear that no one would be able to be there for her, when her time comes. Perhaps it's fair to say that we're all alone in the end, as someone else with a cancer story, Olivia Newton John, said on a daytime talk show I was half watching years ago, when she was asked about her husband's disappearance. I felt like I'd been teleported into a parallel universe where middle aged ex-pop stars say deep and profound things on afternoon TV shows.

No one, least of all me, remembers the exact date in September of 1977 that my father died, but it wasn't the 16th. That would have meant he died on the same day as Elvis. Now that would have been poetic! and I'd remember that. The day Elvis died was also the day Talking

Heads released their first record and completely reinvented pop music in one fell swoop. But I didn't know that then and I didn't hear the record until a few months later, in early 1978.

A boy becomes a man when his father dies, and in 1977 I became a man of sorts, a very young and naive man who didn't understand what it means to be a man, what it requires of him. But that wasn't because my father died, I became a man because of another record, made by a woman in New York City.

For me 1977 wasn't the year of punk, even though I was a guitarist in a mildly famous second division punk band in London playing on the same bill as Siouxsie and the Banshees at the infamous Roxy where I came off stage covered in the gob of Ari Up from The Slits. In the decades that followed young men and women the world over wished they had been in London in 1977 being gobbled on by Ari Up from The Slits, but my dreams were set in New York City. What was happening there was infinitely more nuanced and, let's face it, much sexier than the bleak raw punk scene of the UK.

1977 was the year my father died and it was the year in which the only record I had listened to in the last months of 1976 became about me. That record was Horses by Patti Smith.

His father died, she says matter of factly, and left him a little farm in New England ... all the long black funeral cars left the scene and the boy was just standing there alone.

I was that boy. And 1977 was the year of transformation for a lonely little boy.

Over and over again, day after day after day, I let that half sung half spoken introduction to Birdland wash over me like a wave, and I could feel a tide rise in me again and again and again, The feeling that everything was possible. I wouldn't have been able to articulate it at the time but I was witnessing the dawn of my adult self. This was no ordinary music, this was magic, pure and simple, yet at the same time mysteriously deep and immensely complex.

It was if someone had spread butter on all the fine points of the stars cause when he looked up they started to slip...

Like Morrissey "I allowed Horses to enter my body like a spear" and no music would ever be the same again. I left the band and I left home. I got a job and started a new band. I too wanted to make music which spoke to people like that.

And the boy's face lit up with such naked joy that the sun burned around his lids and his eyes were like two suns, white lids, white opals, seeing everything just a little bit too clearly...

two

I was born into a world of grief. My father's father died two weeks before I was born which is why I bear his name. There was no other name except the name of the one who had just died suddenly without warning of a heart attack in the middle of his morning bowel movement. I never had the opportunity to talk to my father about what it was

like for him to become a man, and then a father, just days after you and your mother and your eleven inconsolable brothers and sisters bury your own father.

I never had the opportunity to talk to him about what it means to be a man, and what it requires of you, but from what I could gather and from what I can remember, my father's ethics were pretty much based on whatever you can get away with. And really you can pretty much get away with anything.

In this way he was a prototype eighties man, even though he didn't live to see them, which is a pity. He would have enjoyed the eighties. Because that is exactly what the eighties were about: What you can get away with. And some people got away with a lot. Somehow everybody suddenly seemed to agree that greed was good. How did that happen? I didn't agree with greed as such but I thought getting away with whatever you could was OK.

I'd been a vegetarian for a years, which made my bandmates call me a fucking hippie, the ultimate insult in

1977. They threatened to hold me down and force-feed me a sausage. I'd suffered numerous humiliations at the hands of various school bullies over the years including having my hair set on fire and having a cigarette put out on my hand, you know who you are Arthur. so I knew full well the kinds of cruelty boys (and men!) were able to get away with.

When a doctor told me I wasn't getting enough protein or vitamins or something and that I should eat meat sometimes, I was broke. I'd just been eating whatever. So I started going into supermarkets, grabbing the most expensive fillet steak I could find, shoving it down the front of my pants and walking out of the store. Fuck paying for meat. Fuck paying for things you need but can't afford if you can just walk out of the store with them. Fuck paying for overpriced products made desirable by advertising and designed to make a profit.

In the eighties I would pretty much stuff anything down the front of my pants or, if it was too big I would just tuck it under my arm and walk out

of the store with it. No one could believe that you could get away with it but you could. I would walk out of anywhere with anything. I walked out of the computer lab at art school with a Mac Plus and a twenty megabyte external hard drive. That was a big cheese in 1988: two and a half thousand dollars and the hard drive was probably another thousand. And those were the good quality Australian dollars from the eighties, the small brown notes and the green ones, when you could buy a house in Sydney for less than a hundred thousand of them.

That eighties train ran on and on, deep into the nineties. People made fortunes. I don't remember much about the nineties except I wasn't on that train. I spent the first half of the decade doing field research on amphetamines and opiates and fucking. I discovered that it was much better when you put it directly into your vein. This really was like a spear entering your body and I was 19 again, except this time I wasn't flying solo, and I guess that was a good thing because when I was turning blue and a soft darkness beckoned, there was an Other

who slapped me around and spent the next hour reminding me to breathe and making sure I didn't slip back into that velvety cocoon.

It was that and several out of body experiences where I multiplied and various dimensions opened up all around me that made me begin to realise I needed to get a better hold on reality, although what that was would never be the same again.

A wormhole opened up in 1995, in the form of a job in the middle of what to me, being a child of the city, seemed like the outback then – Wagga Wagga, four and a half hours drive from Melbourne and five and a half from Sydney, if you didn't break the speed limit. There was no science to it, the wormhole just appeared one day and I jumped in. I slowly weaned myself off everything that was bad for me except fried food, beer and pot. That took care of the next decade and I slowly came to.

By now we are several years into a new millennium and apparently I was what they call 'into my middle age', and I'd

managed to outlive my father.

three

Patriarchy demands of men that they owe the fact of their existence to their fathers, even though it was in their mother's body that they were formed and it was their mothers who kept them alive for long enough to learn to feed themselves.

As I begin the second part of my book – who knows it might be the only book I will ever be able to write or it might be the first of a six volume autobiography – I know what I have to write about next isn't my father, but I feel compelled to write about him.

I have several possibly good beginnings. It would begin with his disappearance of course and then his death but in the part that comes after that I could write:

Sometimes I think the world is divided into two kinds of people : those who were disappointed by their fathers and those that weren't.

And I wonder what it would be like not to be disappointed by your father. I don't mean having a father who is or was, a hero, but just not to experience first hand how weak and sad a grown man can be, and knowing that fifty percent of your genes come directly from that man.

I wonder what it would be like to have a father who is a writer or a painter. I wonder what it would be like to have a gay man for a father, or in any case a man who hadn't spoilt your own heterosexuality with his incomprehensible lasciviousness.

As I grew older and began to approach the age he was when he suddenly died without any warning like his father before him, but of an aneurism, I realised I didn't want – I didn't need – to be like him. I realised I'd been trying to be him all these years, perhaps to honour him, or because he wasn't there himself. Or maybe i just didn't know any better. He was the only man of any significance I knew. All the other people around me were women. Maybe being like him was also a way of compensating my mother whom he had

abandoned.

And this prophet, this skinny shaman, had laid it all down in a studio in New York City back in 1975.

sha da do wop, da shaman do way, sha da do wop, da shaman do way.

I wonder what it would be like to have a poet for a father instead of a policeman. I wonder if I got into teaching because it is actually quite similar to being a policeman but you can pretend it's not. I had to stop teaching high school because I started to think of it as a kind of prison and we, the teachers, were like wardens. And it was the same when I somehow got a job as a university lecturer in a country town quite literally in the middle of nowhere, in the vast hinterland between the cities of Sydney and Melbourne.

Wagga Wagga was an island drifting in a vast ocean of nothing and every year a new lot of inmates would get off the boat there. They were fresh meat. Your job was to keep them on the island and to not fuck them. And mostly, that is

what we did. And the long hot empty in-between days were filled with drinking beer (and wine and whiskey) and smoking lots of pot and we would sigh and say "What the fuck are we doing here?" and there was no answer, except in my case I was clean and I didn't know where to score and I didn't want to know. And they kept dumping a shitload of money into my bank account every two weeks and I was paying off my debts.